DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 451 698 FL 026 565

AUTHOR	Singleton, David; Harrington, Sile; Henry, Alison
TITLE	At the Sharp End of Language Revival: English-Speaking Parents Raising Irish-Speaking Children. CLCS Occasional Paper No. 57.
INSTITUTION	Dublin Univ. Trinity Coll. (Ireland). Centre for Language and Communication Studies.
ISSN	ISSN-0332-3889
PUB DATE	2000-00-00
NOTE	16p.; Project, funded by the European Union (DGXXII), is a collaboration between Trinity College, Dublin, and the University of Ulster at Jordanstown, Northern Ireland. Earlier version presented at the Annual Conference of the European Second Language Association (9th, Lund, Sweden, 1999).
AVAILABLE FROM	The Secretary, Centre for Language and Communication Studies, Trinity College, Dublin 2.
PUB TYPE	Reports - Research (143) -- Speeches/Meeting Papers (150)
EDRS PRICE	EDRS Price MF01 Plus Postage. PC Not Available from EDRS.
DESCRIPTORS	Applied Linguistics; Databases; *Family Environment; Foreign Countries; *Irish; Learning Strategies; Second Language Instruction; *Second Language Learning; Uncommonly Taught Languages
IDENTIFIERS	Ireland; Language Policy

ABSTRACT

This paper is based on information and insights gained from the preliminary data-gathering phase of a project on the acquisition of Irish as first and second language. The main aim of the project is to establish a database constituted of acquisitional data gathered from children acquiring Irish as a first language and in the early stages of bilingual acquisition at home, in Irish-language immersion primary schools, or in largely English-medium primary schools. The paper is based on a body of information and perspectives provided by parents for whom Irish is a second language, raising children who are acquiring Irish as their first language. The paper provides a brief historical summary of the Irish language in Ireland, and a detailed overview of the methodology used in this study. Parents' comments on support and lack of support for their choice of Irish as the language of the home and their "modus operandi" and on various positive and negative aspects of raising their children through Irish. The findings of this study, limited to the small sample size, are compared with a larger and more systematic and comprehensive general 1999 study on families raising their families through Irish by Nic Ghiolla Phadraig. (KFT)

Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made
from the original document.

ED 451 698

PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE AND
DISSEMINATE THIS MATERIAL IN
MICROFICHE ONLY HAS BEEN GRANTED B
D. G. Little
TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES
INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)
2B

TRINITY COLLEGE DUBLIN

Centre for Language and Communication Studies

At the sharp end of language revival: English-speaking parents raising Irish-speaking children

David Singleton, Sîle Harrington and Alison Henry

CLCS Occasional Paper No.57

ISSN 0332 3889

Summer 2000

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION
CENTER (ERIC)
☒ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.
• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

1088568

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

CLCS Occasional Papers

General Editor: D. G. Little

CLCS Occasional Papers report on research carried out within or in association with the Centre for Language and Communication Studies, and on research carried out elsewhere which is of special interest to the Centre's own concerns and activities. In some instances they present the texts of public lectures promoted by the Centre.

The following titles have been published and are available from The [illegible]y, Centre for Language and Communication Studies, Trinity College, Dublin 2.

Autumn 1981

1. D. M. Singleton, *Language transfer: a review of some recent research* (31pp.)
2. Jeffrey L. Kallen, *Linguistics and oral tradition: the structural study of the riddle* (33pp.)
3. D. M. Singleton, *Age as a factor in second language acquisition* (70pp.) [OUT OF PRINT]

Summer 1982

4. Francis Nolan, *Voice quality and speech synthesis* (30pp.)
5. Roger Bennett, *Language elicitation procedures* (23pp.)

Winter 1982-3

6. S. M. Devitt, D. G. Little, S. P. Ó Conchúir & D. M. Singleton, *Learning Irish with* Anois is Arís (128pp.) [OUT OF PRINT]

Autumn 1983

7. William T. Littlewood, *A communicative approach to language-teaching methodology* (19pp.) [OUT OF PRINT]
8. Rose Maclaran, *On the interaction of semantics and pragmatics* (18pp.)
9. E. M. Harding, *Compensation strategies* (54pp.) [OUT OF PRINT]

Autumn 1984

10. Jeffrey L. Kallen, *Generative phonology in the clinic* (38pp.)
11. Gearóid Ó Ciaráin, *The affective dimension in second/foreign language learning: an interactional perspective* (42pp.) [OUT OF PRINT]

Spring 1985

12. D. M. Singleton & D. G. Little, *Foreign languages at second level: defining a syllabus, with particular reference to the needs of the senior cycle* (19pp.)
13. John Harris, *The polylectal grammar stops here* (12pp.) [OUT OF PRINT]

Spring 1986

14. D. G. Little & A. J. Grant, *Learning German without a teacher. Report on a self-instructional programme for undergraduate students of Engineering Science at Trinity College, Dublin, 1982-1984* (60pp.)
15. Máire Owens, *Eithne: a study of second language development* (62pp.)
16. D. Wilson & D. Sperber, *Pragmatics: an overview* (36pp.)

Autumn 1986

17. Ailbhe Ní Chasaide & Eugene Davis, *A data-processing system for quantitative analysis in speech production* (28pp.)
18. Seán M. Devitt, *Learning a foreign language through the media* (69pp.)
19. Meriel Bloor & Thomas Bloor, *Languages for specific purposes: practice and theory* (34pp.) [OUT OF PRINT]

Spring 1988

20. D. G. Little & D. M. Singleton, *Authentic materials and the role of fixed support in language teaching: towards a manual for language learners* (26pp.)

Spring 1989

21. Seán M. Devitt, *Classroom discourse: its nature and its potential for language learning* (72pp.)
22. V. J. Cook, *The relevance of grammar in the applied linguistics of language teaching* (43pp.)

Spring 1990

23. Sera De Vriendt & Pete Van de Craen, *Bilingualism in Belgium: a history and an appraisal* (52pp.)
24. David Singleton, *The cross-linguistic factor in second language learning: a report on some small-scale studies recently conducted at the CLCS* (20pp.)

Autumn 1990

25. Paul Farrell, *Vocabulary in ESP: a lexical analysis of the English of electronics and a study of semi-technical vocabulary* (82pp.) [OUT OF PRINT]
26. David Singleton, *The TCD Modern Languages Research Project: objectives, instruments and preliminary results* (19pp.)
27. Federica Scarpa, *Contrastive analysis and second language learners' errors: an analysis of C-test data elicited from beginners in Italian* (47pp.)

Spring 1991

28. Jennifer Ridley, *Strategic competence in second language performance: a study of four advanced learners* (95pp.) [OUT OF PRINT]

(continued on inside back cover)

CLCS Occasional Paper No.57
Summer 2000

At the sharp end of language revival: English-speaking parents raising Irish-speaking children*

David Singleton, Síle Harrington and Alison Henry

1 Introductory

This paper is based on information and insights gained from the preliminary data-gathering phase of an EU-funded research project on the acquisition of Irish as L1 and L2. The main aim of the project is to establish a database constituted of acquisitional data gathered from children acquiring Irish as a first language and in the early stages of bilingual acquisition at home, in Irish-language immersion primary schools or in largely English-medium primary schools. The material on which the present paper draws, however, is a body of information and perspectives provided by the parents of the children in question – more specifically by parents for whom Irish is an L2 raising children who are acquiring Irish as their L1. This material emerged from the initial subject search – which obviously involved interviewing prospective subject families with a view to ascertaining whether or not they were suitable in the context of the project – and from subsequent informal exchanges with parents of subjects during visits or telephone conversations.

The individuals in question were happy to give permission for their informal comments to be used in a general way for academic purposes (provided that anonymity was guaranteed). However, they were unwilling to be recorded, to be formally interviewed or to respond to a questionnaire on these issues. Accordingly, the account given below of what these parents had to say is of necessity summary in nature and has an essentially heuristic value. Given the informal quality of the data, and given also

---

* An earlier version of this paper was presented at the Ninth Annual Conference of the European Second Language Association (EUROSLA), University of Lund, 1999.

the fact that relatively small numbers of subjects were involved, we can make no claim about the generalizability of our findings; on the other hand, the themes which came to light will be of great value in the preparation of instruments for use in future research currently under discussion in which we hope to include a more systematic focus on the parental dimension.

2 The Irish language in Ireland: a thumbnail sketch

By the time of the foundation of the Irish State, almost eighty years ago, there had been a 30-year period of cultural revival in respect of all things Gaelic, and a major focus of this process had been the Irish language. The language policy of the new state may be summarized as: maintenance, revival, use in public service, and standardization and modernization (Ó Riagáin 1997). At this time Irish was spoken by about 18% of the population of the state, the Irish speakers being concentrated principally in western coastal regions.

The present situation, according to the most recent census figures, is that about 41% of the population of the Republic of Ireland, where most of the Irish speakers reside, consider themselves to be Irish speakers. However, the above figure should be treated with some caution; other estimates suggest that no more than about 3% of the population of the Republic have Irish as their L1 and that only about 5% use Irish on a genuinely regular basis (see, e.g., Baker 1997; Mac Mathúna 1988; Ó Murchú 1984). With regard to current geographical distribution, on the one hand, there are now many more Irish speakers than previously located outside the traditional Irish-speaking, or Gaeltacht, areas, while, on the other hand, monolingual English-speaking inward migration has occasioned a decrease in the percentage of Irish speakers in these latter areas (Government of Ireland 1995). In recent years also, there has been a remarkable growth in the number of Irish-medium primary schools, principally as a result of parental demand, apparently on foot of parents' experience of their use of Naíonraí, or Irish-medium kindergarten (Hickey 1998). This trend has been replicated more recently in Northern Ireland, where parental demand is frequently associated with issues of cultural and ethnic identity. According to a spokesperson from the Department of Education of Northern Ireland, the role of the Department in this connection has become more pro-active as a result of the Good Friday Agreement and subsequent legislation, the policy of encouragement in relation to Irish-medium education now being comparable to policy in relation to denominationally integrated education.

3 The project: objective, subjects and methodology

The present project, which is funded by the European Union (DGXXII), is a twelve-month collaborative venture between Trinity College, Dublin, in the Republic of Ireland, and the University of Ulster at Jordanstown, in Northern Ireland. As has already been stated, its principal objective is to establish a data-bank of the Irish output of children acquiring the language in a variety of situations.

The subject categories around which we organized the data-gathering can be characterized as follows:

- **"L1/L1"** native speakers of Irish, of native-speaking parents (aged 1.6–2.0 approximately);
- **"L1/L2"**: native speakers of Irish whose parents are native speakers of English, whose home language is Irish, and whose daily care is carried out through the medium of Irish (aged 1.6–2.0 approximately);
- **"L2/L2"**: children attending Irish-medium and English-medium primary schools in Dublin and Belfast whose home language is not Irish (aged 5–7 approximately).

The starting point of the subject search was a list based on the researchers' own social and other network contacts, this list being extended by further suggestions from those contacted. Contacts included staff and voluntary members of various language promotion, community support and educational bodies. Subject identification, especially in respect of Northern Ireland, continued into part of the period of data collection.

The reasons for participating in the project given by families who agreed to do so included:

- a general sense that such participation would constitute an extension of their Irish language activism;
- a specific desire to give support to the project because it focused on Irish;
- the notion that participation in the project would provide further incentive/motivation for themselves in their efforts to bring up their children as Irish speakers.

The basic methodology of data collection involved the Research Officer (Síle Harrington) in becoming a "friend of the family" of each child whose individual data were being collected. In the case of families based in rural areas each child in question was visited in his/her home, with at least one parent, usually the mother, present. A selection of toys – including, for example, a toy telephone, a puppet, construction toys, and a farm set – was used to elicit speech during what was presented to and perceived by the child as a play session. An audio tape recorder (Sony Walkman Professional equipped with boundary microphone) was left

running throughout each of the sessions concerned. There was no formal elicitation of data. With regard to families based in urban areas, it turned out that the parents tended to work outside the home, and in such instances they preferred to self-record for much of the data collection period, with the equipment being delivered and collected by the Research Officer *en route* to other appointments.

4 Problems encountered in the subject search

In earlier times in Ireland – up to about two decades ago – there was a pattern in place whereby native speakers of English who were active in Irish language revival interacted in a social network which had language revival as its focus and *raison d'être*. For people who met in the context of this network and who subsequently entered into long-term relationships with each other it was a natural enough decision to make Irish the language of their household. This very clearly delineated, purpose-driven network has now been superseded to some extent by a rather looser network of past pupils of Irish-language immersion schools. However, there is some uncertainty over the extent to which the language of interaction of this latter network and of the partnerships and households to which it gives rise continues consistently to be Irish. Obviously, the attenuation of the earlier style of network renders rather more difficult than might previously have been the case the task of finding families where the parents are L2 speakers of Irish and the children L1 speakers.

Another problem we confronted was that our subject categories proved not to fit very well with the self-perceptions of many of our real-life potential subjects. A number of the parents of children being raised in urban households where Irish is the language of interaction seemed to find the terms L1 and L2 problematic. Some are second-generation urban L1 speakers of Irish for whom English is difficult to regard straightforwardly as an L2; others have a partner whose fluency in Irish is at a very low level, which means that there is a dubium about the precise status of Irish in the household; and others still, perhaps not appreciating the research significance of the categories, vacillate in responding to the question of whether Irish is their L1 or their L2. There appears to be quite a widespread reluctance on the part of parents of potential subjects to categorize their experience or current practice in absolute terms; thus, they may recount that whereas the input they themselves received as children tended to be either English or Irish, as the case might be, input from the other language was also present in their homes. With regard to the language used in their present domestic situations, some parents report speaking "mostly Irish" to their children but English with their partners,

or note that, whereas their households are Irish-speaking as far as the nuclear family members are concerned, English-speaking relatives and/or neighbours are frequent callers, with the consequence that exchanges in English are also frequent features of the family scene.

5 Parents' comments on their decision to raise their children as Irish speakers

The reasons given by the English-speaking parents for deciding to provide an Irish-speaking home environment for their children are quite diverse. They can be classified as follows:

- **Command of the language**: some parents say they are motivated by a desire simply to ensure that their children are fluent in Irish.
- **The age factor**: some parents seem to partake of the widespread perception that it is easier to acquire a language as a very young child than in one's later years.
- **Cognitive advantages**: some parents express the conviction that early bilingualism brings cognitive advantages.
- **Cultural considerations**: some parents state the belief that a child with native competence in Irish will be enabled thereby to participate more fully in Irish cultural life.
- **Duty to the language**: some parents say that they feel they have a duty in respect of the intergenerational transmission of the language.
- **Nationalism**: some parents – especially those based in Northern Ireland – give political, nationalistic reasons for their decision. For example, one parent says that in his view the Irish language is central to Ireland's self-confidence as a nation and that there can be no true independence without it.
- **Personal development**: one parent expresses the point of view that the self-confidence and fulfilment gained in acquiring two languages to native level can lead to the more effective functioning of individuals in society.

With regard to the circumstances of decision-making, a commonly mentioned situation is one in which one parent (usually the father) had a long-standing record of participation in social/cultural networks and had a clear commitment to the notion of the Irish-medium family. In such cases the other partner tended to acquiesce in and co-operate with the idea of establishing Irish as the language of the home. One family mentions that George Saunders's (1988) book *Bilingual children: from birth to teens* was a source of encouragement and ideas in the context of decision-making.

As for the timing of the decision, this seems to have varied quite

considerably. In some instances the decision was made even prior to meeting the partner, in others during the first pregnancy, in others on the birth of the first child, and in others still at the point of initial school attendance. Interestingly enough, some parents report not actually remembering a point at which a specific decision was taken, having apparently seen the idea of rearing their children through Irish as a natural progression in their lives and never having considered the alternative.

6 Parents' comments on support and lack of support for their choice of Irish as the language of the home

A major feature in the parents' informal discussion of support for their choice of home language is their frequent reference to childcare arrangements and facilities. In many of the households with which we came into contact both partners work outside the home for much of the day. Obviously, in such cases childcare cannot but be an issue, the typical pattern being for the child to be looked after by an L1 English speaker – often a relative – and for the language of caring activities to be English. Some families, however, report having access to a crèche with a supervisor who relates to and is supportive of their efforts to raise the child through Irish. A point frequently made is that childcare is a crisis issue for parents in any case, and that trying to find Irish-medium childcare, which is very thin on the ground, constitutes an added dimension to this problem.

Much the same problem is posed in a rather different way when it comes to babysitting arrangements. Extended family members available for babysitting may either respect and support Irish as the child's home language or simply disregard it and interact with the child in English. In the context of support from the extended family, some parents report the phenomenon of grandparents' attending Irish language classes in order to be in a better position to contribute to the child's Irish-medium environment.

Concerning support at official and organizational level there seems to be fairly general satisfaction, although some parents based in the Republic criticized the Department of Health and the Department of Education and Science. Negligence in respect of Irish-medium childcare provision is one of the causes of discontent in these latter instances. The Irish language family support organization, Comhluadar, is praised as being helpful and effective. Those parents working outside the home express disappointment at the fact that their time pressures often prevent them from attending Comhluadar's organized events.

The kinds of support amelioration that parents say they would

appreciate – apart from better childcare possibilities – are:

- more ready availability of advice from parents who have brought up their children through Irish and whose children are now adult;
- a better selection of Irish-language audio and video material suitable for children
- a better selection of Irish language games (for car journeys etc.);
- a better selection of reading material for precocious readers and older children (10+) – reading material aimed at younger children being plentiful and attractive.

7 Parents' comments on their *modus operandi* and on various positive and negative aspects of raising their children through Irish

The parents who talked to us about their experience of raising their children through Irish clearly take their task in this connection extremely seriously. Most report that they do their very best to ensure that Irish is the sole and consistent language of the home – including both the receptive and the productive language of the child. On this latter point some cite with disapproval cases they know of parents who address their child in Irish but acquiesce in the child's replying in English. Some parents also mention the fact that where they have doubts about terminology they always use a dictionary or otherwise check.

All the parents who came within our ambit report that they had very little difficulty in developing an intimate family register in Irish. They say that such a register evolves fairly naturally once the basic "petnames"and terms of endearment have been established. One very positive aspect of the experience of one of the families is the fact that their young Irish-speaking child attracts a great deal of attention from neighbouring children whose L1 is English, who take great delight in interacting with the child in question in Irish. Another positive point mentioned by one family refers to the case of an older child reared through Irish whose level of metalinguistic awareness has been noted and favourably commented on in both Irish-medium and English-medium schools.

The parents are entirely happy to admit, however, that things do not always go according to their best intentions. Situations and events occasionally arise which make it extremely difficult to maintain the position of Irish in the home; examples of such situations and events referred to include illness, bereavement and prolonged visits by non-Irish-speaking relatives. On the other hand, some parents claim that, even where use of Irish was not – for one reason or another – maintained fully in the home; their children's rather variable exposure to Irish nevertheless

stood them in good stead later, their fluency in Irish developing remarkably quickly when they began to attend Naíonraí. Another problem mentioned by some parents is that their older children have sometimes been under pressure from teachers at school to act as a resource and an example for less proficient children. Parents reporting such developments perceive them as creating barriers and as setting up unpleasant associations for the children concerned.

8 A corroborative case study

By way of corroboration of the above findings we offer some selected highlights from an informal interview with a mother whose three bilingual children are now grown up – aged between 17 and 23 years. These latter were clearly not in the frame as far as the present research project was concerned, but the information and observations supplied by their mother – recollected, as it were, in tranquillity – nevertheless echo much of what was said by parents of children who were or might have been included in the project, and will therefore serve as a fitting *coda* to the foregoing.

Both parents in this case have English as their L1. The interviewee, the mother, is a teacher. She met her husband at an Irish-language drama group. They always spoke Irish with each other until a relationship developed between them, at which point they began talking about personal matters in English while continuing to use Irish for less personal matters.

Their decision to bring up their children through Irish seems to have been made tacitly before they married. Their reasons for taking this route were that they wished to broaden their children's options by giving them Irish as well as English to native level, and that they wished to optimize their children's capacity to participate fully in a cultural life and an ethos that was important to their parents.

The two elder children attended an ordinary English-medium school until ages 9 and 7 respectively. When the eldest started at school, he began to speak English to his younger sister, and the three children's proficiency in Irish declined in the order of their birth. Both the eldest children were now very fluent, although none of the three children pursued studies or careers with Irish language connections. In their earlier years all three asked why they were bilingual; they accepted the explanation given to them when they were old enough to understand, but, all the same, they felt "odd" in their monolingual neighbourhood. Their parents never pressurized or forced them to speak Irish.

With regard to support from the extended family, one grandparent

used Irish with the children when they were very young but English later. Wider support within the community was found to be conspicuous by its absence. The incentive of career options with an Irish-language dimension was not very evident to the children as they had grown up. Nor in general was there much visible evidence in the outer suburb where the family resided that they were living in a bilingual society. The Irish media were not particularly helpful either at the time with very little Irish on either radio or television (which contrasts markedly with the present-day situation where there is a radio channel and a television channel exclusively devoted to Irish). Irish-language songs and rhymes for the children to sing and recite, Irish language games for them to play and interesting Irish-language books for them to read in their later years were all difficult to come by. The mother had to exploit an Irish native-speaker friend as a source of suitable material and otherwise use her own resourcefulness – "I had to keep on inventing household/family bilingualism". In the early days there was no organizational support for her efforts whatsoever, but subsequently Teaghlaigh Gaelacha arrived on the scene, running a few events such as Irish-medium Christmas parties. The family provided further Irish-language recreational support for itself by holidaying in the Gaeltacht.

Despite all the difficulties the enterprise is accounted a success by this mother. The whole family, she says, has a good command of Irish and is fully acculturated to the Gaelic dimension of Irish life. Moreover, although the children do not appear to have spoken Irish to friends outside the home up to their teens, all now do so to some extent.

What we see in this case study is the same set of themes that emerged from conversations with the wider group: a fairly clear rationale for embarking on the attempt to make Irish the language of the home, a concern about the level of support in the extended family and in the wider community, a willingness to work hard at the task of raising children through Irish, and a reasonable level of satisfaction with the outcome. It will be interesting to see whether future, more specifically parent-focused research will confirm the salience of such themes, and whether such research will have any impact on the provision of more support for Irish L2 parents rearing Irish L1 children – for example in relation to such an apparently vital area as childcare facilities.

9 A concluding comparison

While our sample was very small, and while no *systematic* information-gathering was carried out in relation to the topics discussed above – the data we obtained coming from informal interviews carried out

at intervals as the opportunity arose – it may nevertheless be of interest to compare, by way of conclusion, the reports and views we elicited from our subjects with the picture which emerges from a recent more general survey of families involved in raising their children through Irish (Nic Ghiolla Phádraig 1999).

As might have been expected, given our selection criteria, which stipulated that, on the one hand, parents should be L2 speakers of the language, and that, on the other, Irish should be subjects' principal home language, it turned out that only one parent from our group had been raised with any significant amount of Irish in the home. A majority of parents who participated in our study did not have a particularly strong background in Irish, whether from the home, from education, or from elsewhere. This contrasts sharply with Nic Ghiolla Phádraig's finding that the home had been the most significant factor in stimulating interest in Irish for a majority of her parent respondents. It is also notewothy that more than two-thirds of Nic Ghiolla Phádraig's respondents had some kind of connection with Irish-language-related employment.

There are a number of other contrasts between Nic Ghiolla Phádraig's respondents and our own. Whereas almost half of the former had met their partners in an Irish-language context, this was not a pattern among the latter – contrary to our initial assumptions. A number of the couples we sourced had in fact had very little or no contact with Irish before meeting each other, though usually one (more often the father) had already made the decision that his/her future family would operate wholly or partly through Irish. With regard to social network support, for Nic Ghiolla Phádraig's parent respondents this came substantially from friends, whereas for our families the most significant social support came from family. While fewer than a third of Nic Ghiolla Phádraig's respondents had overtly discussed the decision that the household should be Irish-speaking/bilingual, such discussion had taken place in all of our families – at some time between the initial stages of their relationship and the birth of the eldest child.

A fairly telling finding of the Nic Ghiolla Phádraig survey is the outcome of the parents' decision, which may well be indicative of the fairly immediate future for our sample. The average age of children referred to in the survey is 11.67. This is probably raised by the wide range of ages of the children in question (up to 30 years); in fact, the majority of children reported on are in the age-range 6–7, while our child subjects and their siblings are generally aged 4 and younger. Approximately half of the Nic Ghiolla Phádraig survey children spoke Irish initially, with slight variations, of the kind we ourselves found, between elder and subsequent

children. However, while the Nic Ghiolla Phádraig figure for equal fluency between Irish and English – as reported by the parents – varies from 41.2% to 60% (the place of the child in the birth order being a factor here), it appears from what the parents say that English now predominates in terms of fluency for most children whose initial language was Irish. The author points out that the birth of Child 2 seems to signal a phase in which more effort is required to maintain the impetus of the initial decision.

A common theme running through our own subjects' comments and those of Nic Ghiolla Phádraig's respondents is the issue of childcare facilities. A number of Nic Ghiolla Phádraig's subjects had decided not to work outside the home to facilitate the decision vis-à-vis the language of the household. Apart from crèche attendance, the most significant strategy in respect of the provision of Irish-medium childcare among Nic Ghiolla Phádraig's respondents was the use of a family member. Our families also reported problems in relation to early childcare; only in the case of one child had there been significant support from a crèche.

With regard to child-child interaction (including with siblings, neighbours and fellow-school pupils), this is reported by Nic Ghiolla Phádraig's parent respondents to be predominantly English-medium, while a significant determinant of the language used in parent-child interaction is that used by the parent. This was also noticeable in our much smaller (and younger) sample.

A further major concern shared by our parents and those surveyed by Nic Ghiolla Phádraig is that of support resources. The most frequently cited resource for facilitating Irish language use in Nic Ghiolla Phádraig's findings is books, followed by Irish-medium activities, though the author points out that opportunities for the latter are reported as infrequent. This response is probably age-related; our own parent subjects reported that they did not always take advantage of such activities, because of lack of time or other pressures. Almost two-thirds of Nic Ghiolla Phádraig's respondents report spending holidays in the Gaeltacht, finding that such visits encourage the use of Irish at home. A similar result emerges from our own interviews, our subjects sometimes remarking on the excited reaction of children on encountering other L1-Irish children during quite early visits. A high percentage of Nic Ghiolla Phádraig's respondents identify television viewing as an important influence on language use, and 18% report that idioms from programmes on Telefis na Gaeilge crop up in their children's speech. This was not a focus-point in our informal interviews, but one might observe in this connection that structures from other dialects were noted both in our L1/L1 transcripts and by our L1 parents,

who perceived television to be their source.

Finally, it is worth saying that in the Nic Ghiolla Phádraig survey as in our own interviews, parent respondents come across as quite upbeat about their experience. In the Nic Ghiolla Phádraig survey, the greatest advantage resulting from the decision to make Irish the language of the home is seen as enhanced linguistic competence. This emerges as a perceived advantage in our research too, although among our subjects cultural and ethnic/nationalist factors, which come further down the scale of importance for Nic Ghiolla Phádraig's respondents, are cited equally frequently. This divergence may be accounted for by the differing profiles of the two groups: Nic Ghiolla Phádraig's sample includes a significant number of fluent or L1 parents, while our interviewees are predominantly people who have made a radical (and relatively recent) linguistic choice in respect of their children, and also include parents resident in Northern Ireland, where language choice is often a political decision.

References

Baker, C., 1997: Bilingual education in Ireland, Scotland and Wales. In J. Cummins (ed.), *Bilingual education*. Dordrecht: Kluwer.

Government of Ireland, 1995: *Facts about Ireland*. Dublin: Department of Foreign Affairs.

Government of Ireland, 1998: *Census: planning for the Ireland of tomorrow. Volume 9. The Irish language*. Dublin: Central Statistics Office.

Hickey, T., 1998: Tuismitheoirí agus an Tum-Reamhscolaíocht. *Teangeolas, 37*, pp.30–37.

Mac Mathúna, L., 1988: Can the gap between "lesser used" and "less widely taught" languages be bridged? A status challenge for Irish. In L. Mac Mathúna, N. French, E. Murphy & D. Singleton (eds), *The less widely taught languages of Europe*. Dublin: IRAAL.

Nic Ghiolla Phádraig, M., 1999: *Comhluadar agus a bhaill: tuairisc ar shuirbhéireacht ar theaghlaigh galltachta ag a bhfuil an Ghaeilge mar theanga bhaile*. Dublin: University College, Ionad taigdhde na hEolaiochta Comhdhaonnaí.

Ó Murchú, M., 1984: Irish and English now. *Ireland Today: Bulletin of the Department of Foreign Affairs*, 1001, pp.11–13.

Ó Riagáin, P., 1997: *Language policy and social reproduction: Ireland 1893–1993*. Oxford: Clarendon.

Saunders, G., 1988: *Bilingual children: from birth to teens*. Clevedon: Multilingual Matters.

© 2000
The authors

29. Susan Abbey, *A case for on-going evaluation in English language teaching projects* (43pp.)

Spring 1992

30. Frank Donoghue, *Teachers' guides: a review of their function* (51pp.)
31. Barbara Byrne, *Relevance Theory and the language of advertising* (76pp.)

Summer 1992

32. Jonathan West, *The development of a functional-notional syllabus for university German courses* (50pp.)
33. James Marnes Bourke, *The case for problem solving in second language learning* (23pp.)

Autumn 1992

34. Tom Hopkins, *Intertextuality: a discussion, with particular reference to* The Waste Land (28pp.)
35. David Singleton & Emer Singleton, *University-level learners of Spanish in Ireland: a profile based on data from the TCD Modern Languages Research Project* (12pp.)

Spring 1993

36. Frank Maguire, *Sign languages: an introduction to their social context and their structure* (39pp.)
37. Ema Ushioda, *Acculturation theory and linguistic fossilization: a comparative case study* (54pp.)

Summer 1994

38. Carl James, Phil Scholfield & George Ypsiladis, *Cross-cultural correspondence: letters of application* (28pp.)
39. Dieter Wolff, *New approaches to language teaching: an overview* (18pp.)

Spring 1995

40. James A. Coleman, *Progress, proficiency and motivation among British university language learners* (38pp.)

Summer 1995

41. Terence Odlin, *Causation in language contact: a devilish problem* (40pp.)
42. Dee McGarry, *An integrated ESL and cultural studies syllabus* (43pp.)

Spring 1996

43. Terence Odlin, *"Sorrow penny yee payed for my drink": taboo, euphemism and a phantom substrate* (24pp.)
44. Michael Sharwood Smith, *The Garden of Eden and beyond: on second language processing* (20pp.)
45. Diana Masny, *Examining assumptions in second language research* (24pp.)

Summer 1996

46. David Little & Helmut Brammerts (eds), *A guide to language learning in tandem via the Internet* (24pp.)

Spring 1997

47. Barbara Lazenby Simpson, *Social distance as a factor in the achievement of pragmatic competence* (60pp.)
48. Danièle Tort-Moloney, *Teacher autonomy: a Vygotskian theoretical framework* (54pp.)
49. Terence Odlin, *Hiberno-English: pidgin, creole, or neither?* (39pp.)

Autumn 1997

50. Robert J. Fouser, *Pragmatic transfer in highly advanced learners: some preliminary findings* (44pp.)
51. Hans W. Dechert, *What's in a life?* (19pp.)

Spring 1998

52. Ghiath El-Marzouk, *Avoidance defined: the psychology of linguistic determinism and the ontology of cognitive predeterminism* (74pp.)
53. David Singleton, *Lexical processing and the "language module"* (38pp.)

Spring 1999

54. Marie Christine Appel, *Tandem language learning by e-mail: some basic principles and a case study* (64pp.)
55. David Little, Ema Ushioda, Marie Christine Appel, John Moran, Breffni O'Rourke, Klaus Schwienhorst, *Evaluating tandem language learning by e-mail: report on a bilateral project* (54pp.)

Summer 2000

56. Laila Aase, Anne-Brit Fenner, David Little, Turid Trebbi, *Writing as cultural competence: a study of the relationship between mother tongue and foreign language learning within a framework of learner autonomy* (52pp.)
57. David Singleton, Sîle Harrington, Alison Henry, *At the sharp end of language revival: English-speaking parents raising Irish-speaking children* (12pp.)
58. Karen Ruddock, *An argument for the use of authentic texts with beginners of Japanese as a foreign language* (12pp.)